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Forster

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TO : The Secretary
 THROUGH: S/S
 FROM : INR - Roger Hilsman

INTELLIGENCE NOTE: Soviets Continue to Seek Abandonment
 of Quarantine While Missiles Stay

Ships Turning. Yesterday's pattern of Soviet ships turning off their Cuban courses has continued. Apparently only tankers are still on course. One, the Bucharest, has cooperated with us by indicating, on request, that its cargo was POL. It was permitted to proceed.

Soviet Intentions. Moscow's immediate purpose still appears to be to leave the initiative for an incident up to the US. In doing so its reasons are probably (1) the desire to identify the US as the aggressor, and (2) recognition that if an incident occurs, the USSR will be helpless at the site of the incident and will face the choice of escalation. We believe Moscow is reluctant to make the latter choice.

Political Action. Soviet strategy at the moment still is designed to gain time and flexibility for political action, designed to get the quarantine stopped while the missiles stay in Cuba. By the turn-around of its ships Moscow is, in effect, already complying with the U Thant proposal, although formally it may refuse to do so; it is thus seeking to exert pressure for at least tacit US abandonment of the quarantine. For the moment it seems intent on insisting that there can be no restriction on weapons in Cuba and that these weapons are designed solely to defend Cuba against aggression. It is probably waiting (1) to see how much momentum will develop for a trade involving US strategic bases, and (2) whether the US is prepared to exert further force to achieve removal of missiles already in Cuba. Until it obtains greater certainty on these points, it will probably keep its missiles in place.

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